



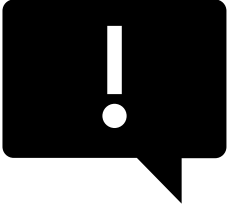
# Creating Inclusive ECE Spaces

Prepared for Wisconsin Department of Children & Families

January 17, 2023



*Sharing a mission of change*



**Please Note:** IFF is not involved with the administration of *Child Care Counts* Program C.

The information contained in this presentation is provided by IFF to share their ideas, expertise, and suggestions in creating inclusive early childhood education spaces.

If you have questions about IFF services, please visit <https://iff.org/>

For all questions related to Child Care Counts and Program C, please contact the Child Care Counts Call Center at [DCFDECECOVID19CCPayments@wisconsin.gov](mailto:DCFDECECOVID19CCPayments@wisconsin.gov) or 608-535-3650



Wisconsin Department of Children and Families

# About IFF

- **Nonprofit lender, real estate consultant, and developer since 1988**
- **Serves Wisconsin and 8 other Midwest states**
- **Assists nonprofits across human service sectors**
  - Including health care, schools, childcare and housing
  - Core values of accessibility and disability inclusion
- **Community-based ECE initiatives in four states including Wisconsin**
  - Research
  - Technical assistance
  - Consulting services
  - Grants and loans to improve ECE facility quality



*Sharing a mission of change*

The background image shows a well-lit, child-friendly art room. In the foreground, there is a white rectangular table with blue plastic chairs. To the left, a wooden shelf holds various art supplies, including a clipboard with a yellow marker, a basket of colorful beads, and a tray with compartments for different colored paints. In the background, more shelves are visible, stocked with paint containers (blue, red, yellow), brushes, and other art materials. A poster on the wall features a red paintbrush and the text "Art Area Area de arte".

Good inclusive design  
=  
Good ECE design



# Inclusive design benefits **all children**

Barrier free design creates an environment where all children can learn and play.

Elements such as lighting, paint colors, windows and material selections create a more productive and healthier built environment for everyone.



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# Disability in Children

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Over 3 million U.S. children -- **4.3% of the under 18 population** – have a disability

*(2019 American Community Survey, US Census Bureau)*

**1 in 44** U.S. children is diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder

*(US Centers for Disease Control, 2018 data)*

# Who benefits from accessible ECE spaces?



Everyone -- Children, Families, Caregivers and Staff



# Four factors that create welcoming space for all

1. Space Use & Accessibility

2. Lighting -- Natural & Artificial

3. Acoustics

4. Color and Visual Clutter







# Space Use and Accessibility





## A design that encourages inclusion...

- Eliminates physical barriers
- Is efficient and safe
- Doesn't create blind spots
- Creates defined areas based on activities
- Has flexibility of use
- Promotes independence for every child



# Ramps & Railings

Can be a design element or a functional adaptation

Everyone uses it the same way



# Bathrooms



Barrier-free entry, low toilets, roll-under sinks, grab bars, motion activated faucets –  
and no high powered air dryers





# Flexible spaces

- Design for options
- Allow space for mobility devices
- Organize room into activity areas based on function
- Provide storage space for non-relevant materials



# Quiet Spaces



Create areas of retreat or refuge that also inspire wonder and imagination

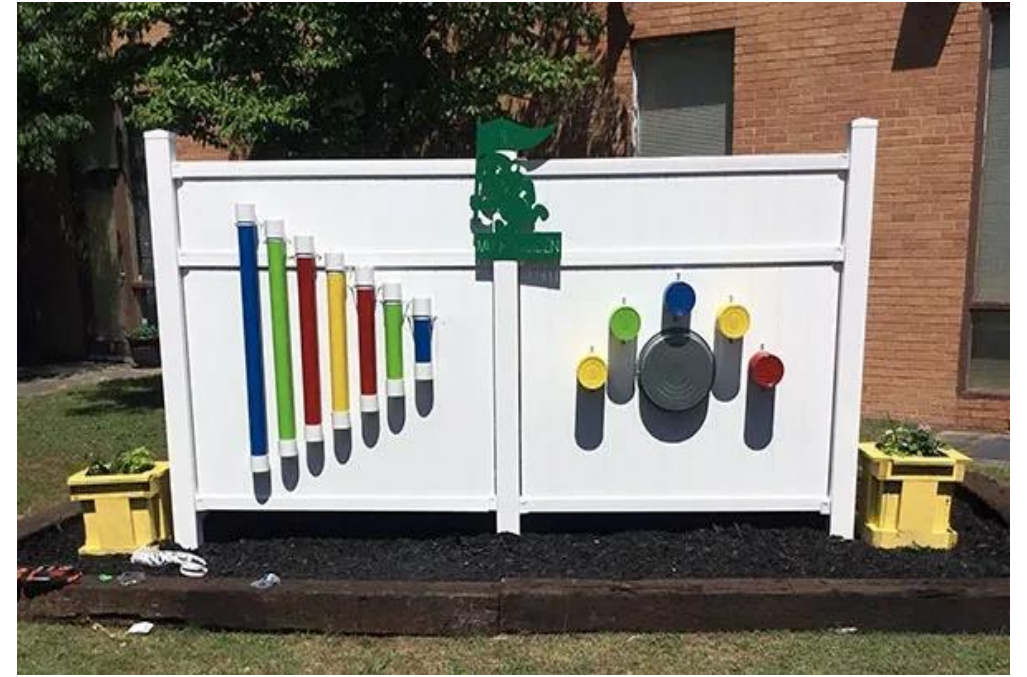




# Play Spaces



# Fun for All





A photograph of a school hallway. The ceiling features a large, multi-paned skylight with a dark metal frame. On the left, there is a long row of grey metal lockers. The walls are a mix of brick and light-colored panels. A red door with glass panes is visible in the distance. The word "Lighting" is overlaid in red text on a semi-transparent white rectangle in the center of the image.

# Lighting





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# POOR LIGHTING IMPACTS A CHILD'S ABILITY TO FOCUS AND CAN LEAD TO POOR LEARNING PERFORMANCE.

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“Research in the use of light in schools has shown that cool-white fluorescent bulbs, (which are used in virtually all classrooms) cause: bodily stress, anxiety, hyper-activity, attention problems and other distress leading to poor learning performance.”

LIGHT: AN ELEMENT IN THE ERGONOMICS OF LEARNING - LAURENCE D. MARTEL, PH.D.





# CONTROLLING LIGHT LEVELS

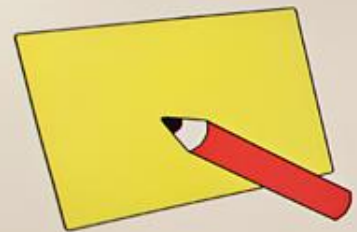
Research has shown that adjusting light levels within a classroom can affect children's behavior and mood.





BEFORE





Writing Area  
Área de escribir



Art Area  
Área de arte



AFTER



Learning in Young Children

Emergency Exit

EXIT

House Area  
Área de casa

CRYSTAL SWANS  
DETROIT, MI





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# ACCESS TO NATURAL LIGHT HAS A DIRECT LINK TO LEARNING OUTCOMES.

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Children with limited natural light were outperformed by those with the most natural light by 20% in math and 26% on reading tests.

SOURCE: U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY





**OUR KIDZ WORLD**  
DETROIT, MI





# NATURAL LIGHT

Natural light elevates mood, increases concentration, and can even help raise average grades by up to 25%





**BLESSED  
DETROIT  
BEGINNINGS**





## BORROWED LIGHT

Many centers are not able to have large windows in every classroom. Work with what you have and look for ways to "borrow light" when direct light isn't possible.



A photograph of a bright, modern classroom. The room has a pink wall and a wooden floor. A glass door with a black frame is set into the pink wall, with an 'EXIT' sign above it. To the left of the door is a small wooden shelf with a basket and some items. To the right of the door are three colorful signs with the numbers 1, 2, and 3. In the center of the room is a long wooden table with a chalkboard on one end. To the right of the table are several wooden cribs and a blue play structure. A large window is on the right wall, letting in natural light. The room is filled with various toys and furniture, creating a warm and inviting atmosphere.

## SIMPLE SOLUTIONS

Replacing a solid door with glass is a cost effective way to introduce light into a classroom without having to create a new opening.





# Acoustics



# Acoustic Panels

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Luxury vinyl tile (LVT)  
flooring, low-pile rugs,  
soft sculptural elements help  
control sound





Color



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# COLOR IN LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

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Light unsaturated earth tones with small areas of bright color are calming.

Using color to designate different spaces is another useful tool for neurodiverse children.





## BEFORE

Bright colors and patterns promote excitement and movement





AFTER





BEFORE



# AFTER

- Soothing neutral colors
- Woodgrain flooring brings in nature and feels warm and familiar.





A photograph of a child's playroom. The room has light green walls on the left and a pink wall in the background. The floor is made of light-colored wood. In the foreground, there is a small wooden table with four chairs. To the left, there is a large window with a black frame. In the background, there is a white counter or partition. The ceiling has exposed wooden beams and several fluorescent lights. A white rectangular box with the text "Visual Clutter" is overlaid in the center of the image.

# Visual Clutter









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# EXCESS VISUAL NOISE NEGATIVELY IMPACTS LEARNING.

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A Carnegie Mellon University study (Fisher, Godwin, & Seltman, 2014) found that children in heavily decorated classrooms were more distracted, spent more time off-task, and demonstrated smaller learning gains than when the decorations were removed.



A photograph of four young children sitting around a light-colored wooden table in a classroom. They are engaged in a learning activity using colorful plastic blocks (red, yellow, blue, green) and a worksheet with a grid and numbers. One child in the foreground is wearing a red shirt and is focused on the worksheet. Another child to the right is wearing a black shirt and looking towards the camera. A third child in the background is wearing a white shirt and is also working with the blocks. A fourth child in the top left is wearing a red and yellow shirt. The background shows a wooden floor and a shelf with more toys.

Project ideas  
for every budget



# Under \$1,000

## SENSORY KITS

Create an age-appropriate kit with sensory bags, noise canceling headphones, fidgets; purchase an imaginary play structure that doubles as quiet space

## OUTDOOR PLAYSPACES

Add a sensory wall; install a small water feature; build a raised planting bed for a sensory garden

## FRIENDLY FINISHES

Repaint a room in a sensory-friendly color; add ADA drawer pulls; add dimmers to existing lighting; install handrails in bathroom; reduce clutter with a modular organizer

## ADAPTIVE TOOLS

Buy large foam grips for crayons and utensils, items with larger buttons, specialty scissors, adaptive feeding spoons, bowls with suction cups for stability, visual choice boards





# \$1,000 to \$5,000

## ACCESS

- Install exterior concrete ramp and handrail
- Widen doorways to double-stroller width
- Level or replace flooring with durable LVT in a soothing color

## SOUND & LIGHT

- Install sound baffling wall panels
- Replace fluorescent lighting with LED cans or silent adjustable lighting
- Bring in more natural light by replacing a glass block window

## MORE

- Switch traditional faucets to motion-activated models
- Add a child-level plumbing fixtures, like a work sink
- Communication devices for non-verbal kids can be as simple as a tablet with an app





## \$5,000 to \$10,000

**ACCESS:** Install automatic door opener with access button

**LIGHT:** “Borrow” internal light with a glass door or interior window

**FF&E:** Replace furnishings with modular roll-under pieces that can be reconfigured easily and matching storage cabinets with doors

**OUTDOOR PLAYSPACES:** Add inclusive outdoor play equipment; replace wood chips with a rubberized poured-in-place surface



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